

PCT

WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ORGANIZATION
International Bureau

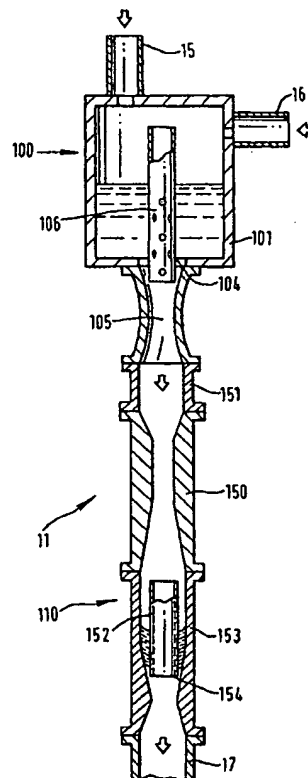
INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(51) International Patent Classification ⁷ : C10L 3/10, B01D 53/26		A1	(11) International Publication Number: WO 00/56844 (43) International Publication Date: 28 September 2000 (28.09.00)
(21) International Application Number: PCT/GB00/01070 (22) International Filing Date: 21 March 2000 (21.03.00) (30) Priority Data: 9906717.5 23 March 1999 (23.03.99) GB (71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): DEN NORSKE STATS OLJESELSKAP A.S. [NO/NO]; N-4035 Stavanger (NO). (72) Inventors; and (75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): NILSEN, Finn, Patrick [GB/NO]; Sore Furudalen 3, N-5044 Nattland (NO). LINGA, Harald [NO/NO]; Kringelbotn 267, N-5050 Nesttun (NO). (74) Agents: REES, David, Christopher et al.; Kilburn & Strode, 20 Red Lion Street, London WC1R 4PJ (GB).		(81) Designated States: AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, CA, CH, CN, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EE, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VN, YU, ZA, ZW, ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG). Published With international search report.	

(54) Title: METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR THE DRYING OF NATURAL GAS

(57) Abstract

A system for removing water from natural gas which comprises: bringing the natural gas into contact with a liquid including an absorbent for the water; subjecting the natural gas and liquid to turbulent mixing conditions thereby causing the water to be absorbed by the absorbent; and separating a natural gas phase with reduced water content and a liquid phase including the absorbent and absorbed water. The mixing is conducted in a turbulent contactor (11) including a gas inlet (15), a liquid inlet (16), an outlet (104) leading to a venturi passage (105) and a tube (106) extending from the outlet (104) back upstream. The tube (106) may be perforated and/or spaced from the periphery of the outlet (104).



Best Available Copy

FOR THE PURPOSES OF INFORMATION ONLY

Codes used to identify States party to the PCT on the front pages of pamphlets publishing international applications under the PCT.

AL	Albania	ES	Spain	LS	Lesotho	SI	Slovenia
AM	Armenia	FI	Finland	LT	Lithuania	SK	Slovakia
AT	Austria	FR	France	LU	Luxembourg	SN	Senegal
AU	Australia	GA	Gabon	LV	Latvia	SZ	Swaziland
AZ	Azerbaijan	GB	United Kingdom	MC	Monaco	TD	Chad
BA	Bosnia and Herzegovina	GE	Georgia	MD	Republic of Moldova	TG	Togo
BB	Barbados	GH	Ghana	MG	Madagascar	TJ	Tajikistan
BE	Belgium	GN	Guinea	MK	The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	TM	Turkmenistan
BF	Burkina Faso	GR	Greece	ML	Mali	TR	Turkey
BG	Bulgaria	HU	Hungary	MN	Mongolia	TT	Trinidad and Tobago
BJ	Benin	IE	Ireland	MR	Mauritania	UA	Ukraine
BR	Brazil	IL	Israel	MW	Malawi	UG	Uganda
BY	Belarus	IS	Iceland	MX	Mexico	US	United States of America
CA	Canada	IT	Italy	NE	Niger	UZ	Uzbekistan
CF	Central African Republic	JP	Japan	NL	Netherlands	VN	Viet Nam
CG	Congo	KE	Kenya	NO	Norway	YU	Yugoslavia
CH	Switzerland	KG	Kyrgyzstan	NZ	New Zealand	ZW	Zimbabwe
CI	Côte d'Ivoire	KP	Democratic People's Republic of Korea	PL	Poland		
CM	Cameroon	KR	Republic of Korea	PT	Portugal		
CN	China	KZ	Kazakstan	RO	Romania		
CU	Cuba	LC	Saint Lucia	RU	Russian Federation		
CZ	Czech Republic	LJ	Liechtenstein	SD	Sudan		
DE	Germany	LK	Sri Lanka	SE	Sweden		
DK	Denmark	LR	Liberia	SG	Singapore		
EE	Estonia						

Method and Apparatus for the Drying of Natural Gas

The present invention is concerned with a method and apparatus for the removal of water from natural gas.

5 Natural gas as extracted from reservoirs contains water vapour. The concentration of the water vapour depends on the temperature and pressure of the gas at the extraction point. During the processing of the gas, particularly if it is treated to remove acid gas
10 components such as carbon dioxide, CO_2 , and hydrogen sulphide, H_2S , it may come into contact with aqueous solvents. This means that the gas may pick up further water vapour. When the gas is contacted with an aqueous solvent, it will become saturated with water vapour at the
15 prevailing temperature and pressure. Before the gas is exported from the production facility the water vapour concentration in the gas must be reduced to very low levels. A typical specification may be 0.2 parts per million by volume (ppm v/v) of water in the gas. This is
20 well below the concentrations which will normally be in the gas as extracted and well below the value after processing to remove CO_2 and/or H_2S . The gas, therefore has to be dried before it can be compressed for export.

 Currently, the processes are generally used to dry a
25 gas. These are based on absorption or adsorption respectively. In the adsorption, the gas is contacted with a porous solid material. The water vapour adsorbs onto the surface of the solid. The adsorbent is usually a silicious material, typically a mixture of aluminium and
30 silica oxides known as molecular sieves. In absorption the gas is contacted with a chemical reagent which removes the water. The present application is concerned with absorption drying-dehydration processes.

 In conventional drying processes alcohols, usually

the glycols, monoethylene glycol, MEG, or triethylene glycol, TEG, are contacted with gas in a countercurrent tower. The gas is normally saturated with water vapour at the inlet conditions, temperature and pressure. The
5 saturation concentration increases with increasing temperature and decreasing pressure. In a typical set of conditions, 80 °C and 70B (7 x 10⁶ Pa) pressure, the saturation concentration is 8 x 10⁻³ kg/mmscm of gas. The concentration of water in the outlet gas will vary
10 slightly with conditions on pipe line specifications but is typically of the order of 6.4 x 10⁻⁵ kg/mmscm of gas. This corresponds to a water dew point at 70Bg of -7 °C, well below the hydrate formation point.

In order to assess the absorption duty between these
15 low concentrations, the thermodynamic equilibrium data - concentration of water in the gas, y^* , and concentration of water in the liquid phase, x - is required. Note:-

$$y^*_p = f(x)_p \quad (1)$$

20

i.e., the function f is dependent on the pressure. The relevant data shows that the separation can be achieved in one theoretical stage, i.e. if equilibrium were achieved in the contacting (mixing) process, then one
25 contact between the gas and liquid should give the required duty of water removal from the gas.

However, in conventional countercurrent tower units, 4 actual stages are normally specified. Stage efficiencies greater than 50% are simply not achieved.

30

It is therefore an object of the invention to provide a method and apparatus which enables water vapour to be removed from a natural gas with greater efficiency.

According to the invention, there is provided a method of removing water from natural gas which comprises: bringing the natural gas into contact with a liquid including an absorbent for the water; subjecting the
5 natural gas and liquid to turbulent mixing conditions thereby causing the water to be absorbed by the absorbent; and separating a natural gas phase with reduced water content and a liquid phase including the absorbent and absorbed water; and in which the mixing is conducted in a
10 turbulent contactor including a gas inlet, a liquid inlet, an outlet leading to a venturi passage and a tube extending from the outlet back upstream, the tube being perforated and/or being spaced from the periphery of the outlet.

While the invention has been described in relation to
15 natural gas, it is equally applicable to other gases with a water content which it is desirable to reduce.

The invention also extends to the apparatus for carrying out this method.

The turbulent mixing is very intense and results in
20 extremely efficient gas liquid contact. The mixing regime is preferably turbulent shear layer mixing. The liquid entrained in the gas may be in the form of droplets for gas continuous fluid phase distribution. The efficient mixing means that absorption can take place very rapidly and in a
25 relatively small total volume of absorbent compared to that required in conventional absorption columns. The mixing system used is simple and inexpensive compared to prior art systems, leading to reduced costs. Finally, an efficiency of approaching 100% for the removal of water can be
30 achieved for certain applications.

The advantages of such a mixer in relation to conventional countercurrent dehydration towers are a reduction in the size and weight of the equipment.

Preferably, the method is carried out as a continuous process with the natural gas and liquid flowing co-currently. The co-current flow reduces the problems associated with foaming and flooding, since absorption can
5 continue downstream of the contactor.

One suitable contactor is a mixer supplied by Framo Engineering A/S and is described in EP-B-379319.

Preferably, the tube is located in a vessel, the vessel including the gas inlet, the liquid inlet and the
10 outlet. In one possible regime, the natural gas is supplied to the tube, optionally directly, and the liquid is supplied to the vessel, and so the natural gas stream draws the liquid into the venturi and the two phases are mixed. In another regime, the natural gas is supplied to
15 the vessel and the liquid is supplied to the tube, optionally directly, whereby the natural gas is drawn into the venturi by the liquid and the two phases are mixed. In a third regime, the liquid and the natural gas are supplied to the vessel, the liquid being supplied to a level above
20 the level of the outlet, whereby the natural gas is forced out through the outlet via the tube, thereby drawing the liquid into the venturi so that the two phases are mixed.

Preferably, the natural gas and the liquid are formed into a homogeneous mixture in the contactor, the
25 homogeneous mixtures optionally being cooled prior to separation into a gas phase and a liquid phase. Preferably, the homogeneous mixture is separated into a gas phase and a liquid phase in a hydrocyclone. Preferably, the absorbent in the liquid phase is subjected to a
30 regeneration treatment to remove the absorbed water. Preferably, the regenerated absorbent-containing liquid phase is recycled to the contactor. Preferably, the regeneration is carried out by heating and/or by flashing off the water. Where the absorbent is a glycol,

regeneration may be carried out by heating the solution to about 200 °C and passing the vapours to a fractionating tower. Preferably, the post-mixing cooling and the regenerative heating are achieved, at least in part by mutual heat exchange.

Partial recovery of the glycol may be attained by flashing off the water vapour by reducing the applied pressure on the liquid after gas dehydration. Where this is used then a similar turbulent mixer may be considered for this duty. This flashing operation will only give a partial glycol regeneration. In order to get to the very low levels of water content of the glycol solutions necessary for gas dehydration, heating of the solvent phase is required.

According to a more specific aspect of the invention, there is provided a method for removing water from a natural gas which comprises: supplying the natural gas to a turbulent contactor; supplying a liquid including an absorbent for the water to the contactor; subjecting the natural gas and the liquid to turbulent mixing in the contactor to form a homogeneous mixture; allowing the water to be absorbed by the absorbent; separating the homogeneous mixture into a gas phase and a liquid phase in a hydrocyclone (or any other gas/liquid separator); removing the gas phase; subjecting the solvent in the liquid phase to a regeneration treatment to remove the absorbed water; and recycling the regenerated absorbent-containing liquid phase to the contactor.

A portion of the solvent, after extraction may be recycled directed to the contactor.

Preferably, the absorbent includes a glycol or another water-miscible liquid. Preferably, the glycol is ethylene glycol, diethylene glycol, triethylene glycol or a mixture of any of these. The chosen absorbent could also be

immiscible with water and in this case, a facility for separating the water from the absorbent would need to be introduced downstream of the gas/liquid separator.

Diethylene glycol (DEG) and monoethylene glycol (MEG) are typical solvents for dehydration. Triethylene glycol (TEG) is currently the most popular solvent since it has a higher degradation temperature and can be regenerated to a higher lean concentration with no modification to a standard boiler. There has recently been a trend towards the reduction in BTEX (benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, xylene) emissions which has in some cases favoured the use of MEG due to the much lower solubility of BTEX in this solvent. The penalty, however, is much higher glycol losses. The present invention envisages the use of any dehydration agent. However, the short residence time in the preferred contactor system (as compared with a counter-current absorption column) will necessarily result in less co-absorption of BTEX components in a given glycol system.

Preferably the natural gas and liquid are subjected to two or more mixing steps. Additional mixing steps may be carried out before and/or after the turbulent mixing step. One or more (or indeed all) of the additional mixing steps may themselves be turbulent mixing steps. They might be carried out using a similar turbulent contactor, or some other turbulent contactor, such as an ejector, a jet pump, or a mixer as described in WO 95/02448. Preferably, there are two or more turbulent mixing steps.

When second turbulent mixing is adopted, it is preferably conducted in a turbulent contactor comprising at least one fluid inlet, an outlet leading to a venturi passage, and a tube extending from the outlet back into the contactor. Preferably, the second contactor has a gas inlet and a liquid inlet. The tube may or may not be perforated, and the gap between the tube and the outlet may

be varied. Preferably, the second turbulent contactor is located in a pipe extending from the venturi section of the first contactor. The second turbulent contactor may also have a separate liquid inlet for the addition of fresh
5 absorbent.

The invention also extends to apparatus for carrying out such a method, comprising: a turbulent contactor having a liquid inlet, a gas inlet and a fluid outlet; an optional cooler for the fluid stream from the fluid outlet; a
10 hydrocyclone arranged to separate the fluid stream into a gas phase and a liquid stream; a regenerator arranged to treat the separated liquid stream; and a recycle line arranged to convey the regenerated liquid stream to the contactor.

The apparatus may include a recycle line for the liquid stream from the separator to the contactor, by-passing the regenerator. There may also be a further separator, for example, in the form of a flash tank, in the recycle line to allow absorbed water to be released from
15 the liquid.

The apparatus may include a pump arranged to supply liquid to the liquid inlet of the contactor. Preferably, the regenerator is a heater and/or a flash tank.

The invention may be considered to extend to the use
25 of a turbulent contactor to remove water from natural gas by forming a homogeneous mixture of the gas mixture with an absorbent for the water in the contactor, allowing the water to be absorbed by the absorbent, and subsequently separating a gas phase and a liquid phase, the liquid phase
30 thereby containing the water.

The invention may be put into practice in various ways and some embodiments will be described by way of example to illustrate the invention with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a flow diagram of a process in accordance with the invention;

Figure 2 is a view of the contacting section of the apparatus; and

5 Figure 3 is a view of the glycol separation and regeneration sections.

Figure 1 shows a process for removing water from a gas stream, in accordance with the invention. The process comprises a turbulent contactor stage 11, a gas liquid
10 separator 12, a depressurizer 13 and a glycol regeneration stage 14. Water-bearing natural gas is fed to the contactor at 15 and a triethylene glycol (TEG) absorbent at 16. In the contactor 11, the TEG absorbs the water from the natural gas and a homogeneous gas/liquid mixture leaves
15 the contactor at 17.

The mixture is conveyed via line 18 to the separator 12 where the gas and liquid phases are separated. A water-free gas phase leaves the separator 12 at 19 and a liquid phase, comprising TEG and absorbed water is removed at 21.

20 This liquid phase is conveyed via a line 22 to a depressuriser 13 where water vapour is flashed off and removed via a water vapour outlet 23. The TEG with the remaining water is conveyed via a line 24 to the glycol regeneration stage 14, from which glycol is removed via a
25 glycol outlet 25 and water is removed via a water outlet 26. The regenerated glycol can be recycled to the glycol inlet 16 to the contactor stage 11.

The contactor stage 11 is shown in more detail in Figure 2. This stage 11 comprises two stages. The
30 turbulent contactor 100 forming the first stage comprises a vessel 101 having the natural gas inlet 15, the glycol inlet 16 and an outlet 104 leading to a venturi passage 105. There is a tube 106 (which may or may not be perforated) extending from the outlet 104 back into the

vessel 101.

The glycol and the natural gas are supplied to the vessel 101, the glycol being supplied to a level above the level of the outlet 104, whereby the gas is forced out through the outlet 104 via the tube 106, thereby drawing the glycol into the venturi so that the two phases are mixed.

The homogeneous gas/liquid mixture from the first turbulent contactor 100 is conveyed to a second turbulent contactor 110. Thus, the mixture enters an annular flow generator 150 from a spool piece 151, or directly from the diffuser of the venturi 105. As the gas/liquid mixture flows through the expanding outlet part of the annular flow generator 150, a liquid film establishes at the wall to form an annular gas/liquid flow essentially with the gas in the pipe core and the liquid at the pipe wall. The liquid film will be maintained in the annulus between inner and outer pipes 152 and 153 respectively.

The conditions at the outlet 154 of the inner pipe 152 are similar to the conditions at the outlet 104 of the first turbulent contactor. It is clear that, in principle, any number of stages can be added to the system, although considerations such as pressure drop should be taken into account.

As shown in Figure 2, the mixture leaving the second contactor 110 at the outlet 17 is conveyed to a hydrocyclone gas liquid separator 12 via a tangential inlet 31 (see Fig. 3). The two phases present are separated in the normal way. The gas phase, comprising dehydrated natural gas, passes upwards via a centre tube 32 and two demistor stages 33,34, and leaves via the gas outlet 19. The liquid phase, comprising glycol and absorbed water, passes downwards via a conical collector 35 and leaves via the liquid outlet 21. Accumulated liquid can be drained

from tubes at 37 at the level of the support ring for the centre tube 32.

5 The liquid is conveyed to a depressuriser 13, where some of the absorbed water is flashed off and leaves via the water vapour outlet 23. The glycol and any remaining absorbed water is pumped to the glycol regenerator 14 via the line 24. Here, the remaining absorbed water is separated from the glycol. The water is removed via the outlet 25 and dehydrated glycol is removed via the glycol
10 outlet 26. This regenerated glycol is then recycled to the glycol inlet 16 to the contactor stage 11, via a recycle line 36.

Claims:

1. A method of removing water from natural gas which comprises: bringing the natural gas into contact with a liquid including an absorbent for the water; subjecting the natural gas and liquid to turbulent mixing conditions thereby causing the water to be absorbed by the absorbent; and separating a natural gas phase with reduced water content and a liquid phase including the absorbent and absorbed water; and in which the mixing is conducted in a turbulent contactor including a gas inlet, a liquid inlet, an outlet leading to a venturi passage and a tube extending from the outlet back upstream, the tube being perforated and/or being spaced from the periphery of the outlet.
2. A method as claimed Claim 1, in which the tube is located in a vessel, the vessel including the gas inlet, the liquid inlet and the outlet.
3. A method as claimed in Claim 2, in which the natural gas is supplied to the tube and the liquid is supplied to the vessel, and so the natural gas stream draws the liquid into the venturi and the two phases are mixed.
4. A method as claimed in Claim 2, in which the natural gas is supplied to the vessel and the liquid is supplied to the tube, whereby the natural gas is drawn into the venturi by the liquid and the two phases are mixed.
5. A method as claimed in Claim 2, in which the liquid and the natural gas are supplied to the vessel, the liquid being supplied to a level above the level of the outlet, whereby the natural gas is forced out through the outlet

via the tube, thereby drawing the liquid into the venturi so that the two phases are mixed.

5 6. A method as claimed in any preceding Claim, in which the method is carried out as a continuous process with the natural gas and liquid flowing co-currently.

10 7. A method as claimed in any preceding Claim, in which the natural gas and the liquid are formed into a homogeneous mixture in the contactor, the homogeneous mixture optionally being cooled prior to separation into a gas phase and a liquid phase.

15 8. A method as claimed in Claim 7, in which the homogeneous mixture is separated into a gas phase and a liquid phase in a hydrocyclone.

20 9. A method as claimed in any preceding Claim, in which the absorbent in the liquid phase is subjected to a regeneration treatment to remove the absorbed water.

25 10. A method as claimed in Claim 9, in which the regenerated absorbent-containing liquid phase is recycled to the contactor.

11. A method as claimed in Claim 10, in which the regeneration is carried out by heating and/or by flashing off the absorbed water.

30 12. A method as claimed in Claim 11, in which the post-mixing cooling and the regenerative heating are achieved, at least in part by mutual heat exchange.

13

13. A method as claimed in any preceding Claim, in which the absorbent is miscible with water.
14. A method as claimed in any of Claims 1 to 12, in which
5 the absorbent is immiscible with water.
15. A method as claimed in any of Claims 1 to 12, in which the absorbent includes a glycol.
- 10 16. A method as claimed in Claim 15, in which the absorbent is monoethylene glycol, diethylene glycol, triethylene glycol or a mixture of any of these.
- 15 17. A method as claimed in any preceding Claim, in which the natural gas and liquid are subjected to two or more mixing steps.
- 20 18. A method as claimed in Claim 17, in which an additional mixing step is carried out before the turbulent mixing step.
- 25 19. A method as claimed in Claim 17 or Claim 18, in which an additional mixing step is carried out after the turbulent mixing step.
- 30 20. A method as claimed in Claim 18 or Claim 19 in which one or more additional mixing steps are turbulent mixing steps.
21. A method as claimed in Claim 20, in which the second mixing step is carried out in a second contactor, located in a pipe extending from the venturi passage of the first contactor.

22. A method as claimed in Claim 21, in which the fluid mixture is separated into a gas phase and a liquid phase between the two contactors, the phase separation preferably occurring in an annular flow generator.
- 5 23. A method as claimed in any of Claims 17 to 22, in which fresh liquid solvent is added to the second contactor.
- 10 24. Apparatus for removing water from natural gas by bringing the natural gas into contact with a liquid including an absorbent for the water, comprising: a turbulent contactor in which the natural gas and liquid are subjected to turbulent mixing conditions thereby causing
- 15 the water to be absorbed by the absorbent; and a separator for separating a natural gas phase with reduced water content and a liquid phase including the absorbent and absorbed water; and in which the turbulent contactor comprises a gas inlet, a liquid inlet, an outlet leading to
- 20 a venturi passage and a tube extending from the outlet back upstream, the tube being perforated and/or being spaced from the periphery of the outlet.
- 25 25. Apparatus as claimed Claim 24, in which the tube is located in a vessel, the vessel including the gas inlet, the liquid inlet and the outlet.
- 30 26. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 24 or Claim 25, in which the separator includes a hydrocyclone.
27. Apparatus as claimed in any of Claims 24 to 26, in which the separator includes an absorbent regenerator.

15

28. Apparatus as claimed in any of Claims 24 to 27, in which the contactor includes two or more contactor steps.

5 29. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 28, in which the second turbulent contactor is located in a pipe extending from the venturi section of the first contactor.

10 30. The use of one or more turbulent contactor for absorbing water from a natural gas stream, in which the gas stream is brought into contact with a liquid including an absorbent for water, at least one of the turbulent contactors comprising a gas inlet, a liquid inlet, an outlet leading to a venturi passage and a tube extending from the outlet back upstream.

15 31. A use as claimed in Claim 30, in which the second turbulent contactor is located in a pipe extending from the venturi section of the first contactor.

20 32. A use as claimed in Claim 30 or Claim 31, in which a gas phase and a liquid phase are separated after exit from a first turbulent contactor before entry into a second turbulent contactor, the phase separation preferably occurring in an annular flow generator.

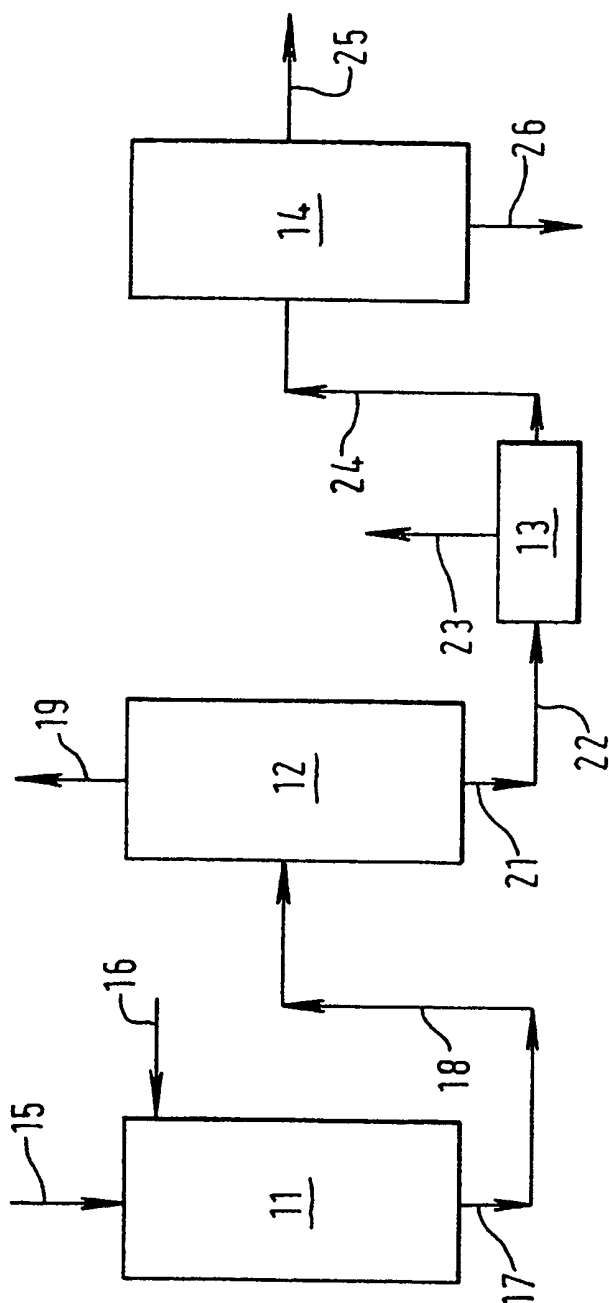
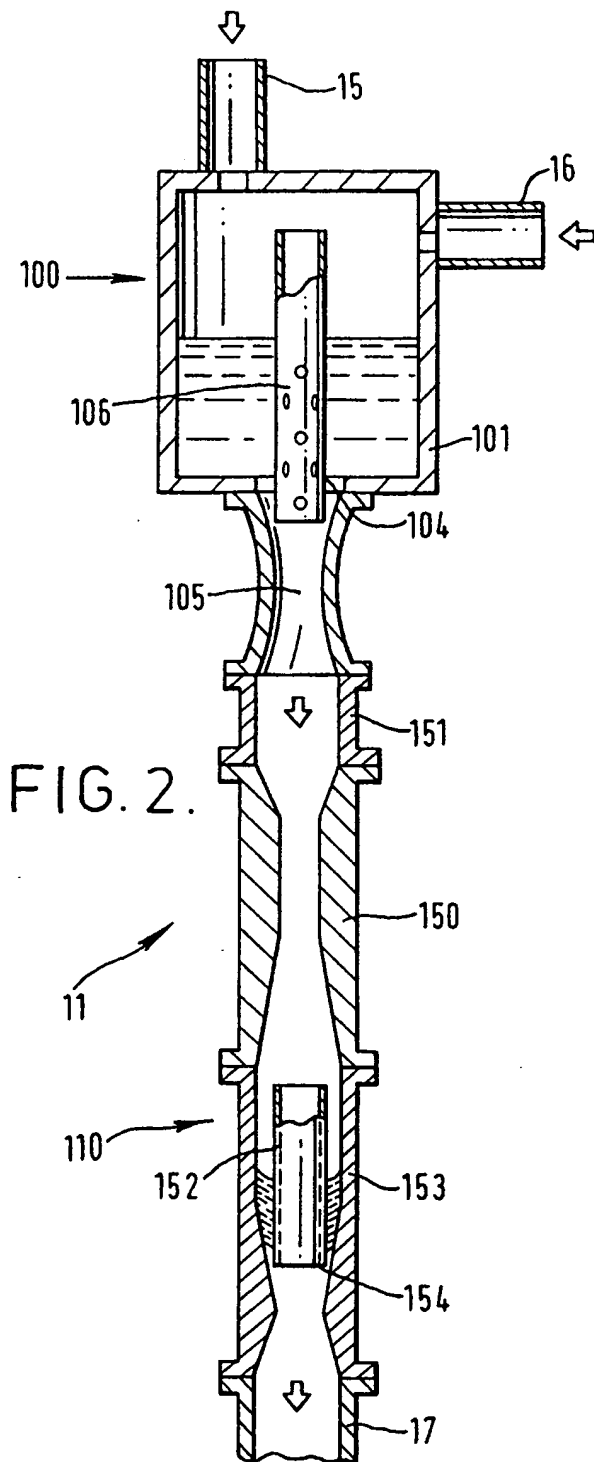


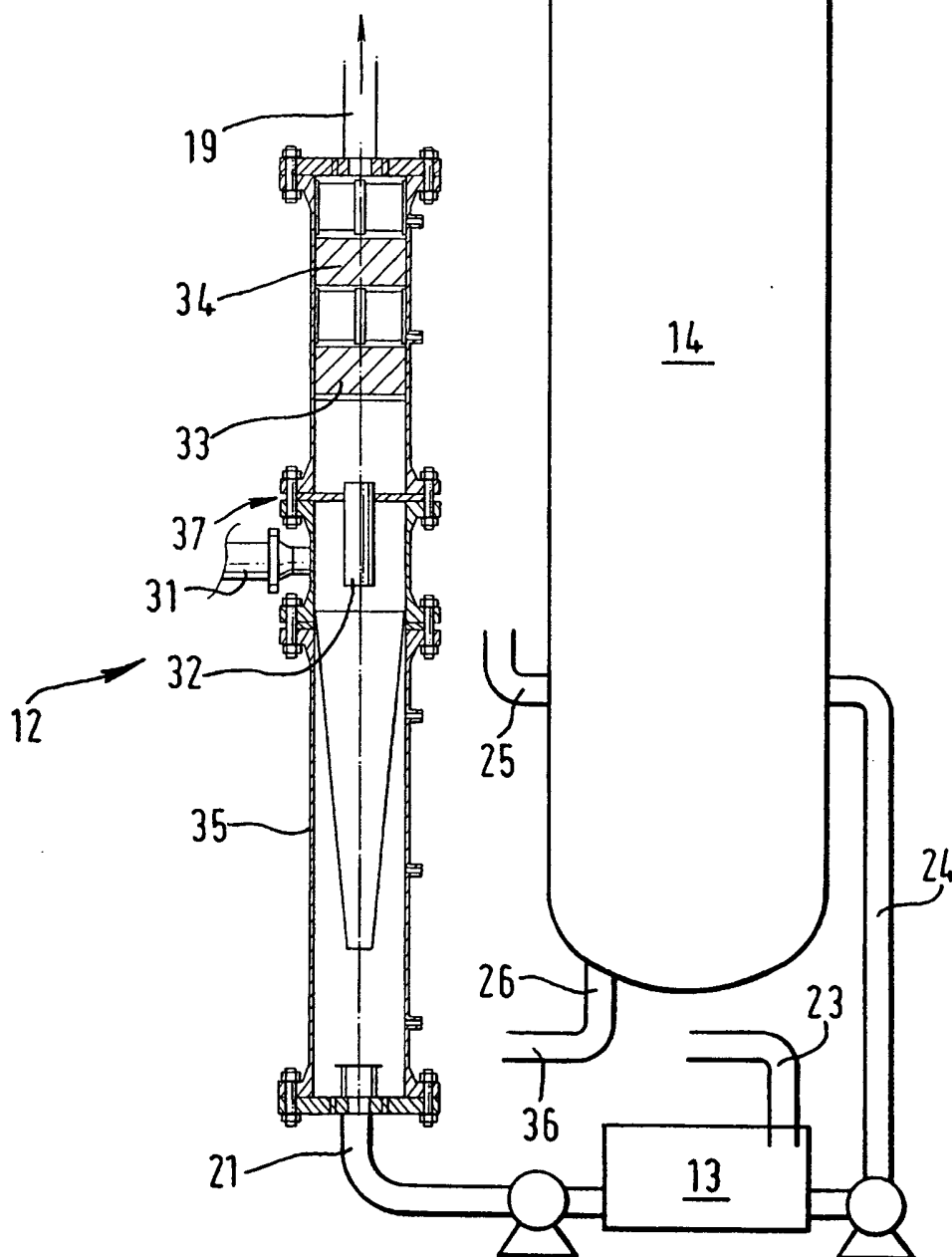
FIG. 1.

2 / 3



3 / 3

FIG. 3.



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Intern. Appl. No.

PCT/GB 00/01070

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 7 C10L3/10 B01D53/26

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 7 C10L B01D C10G

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, PAJ, WPI Data

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	GB 2 301 048 A (KCC PROCESS EQUIPMENT LTD) 27 November 1996 (1996-11-27) the whole document	1,6,9, 13,15, 19,23, 24,27,30
A	US 4 279 628 A (WYMER ROBERT L ET AL) 21 July 1981 (1981-07-21)	



Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.



Patent family members are listed in annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

- *A* document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance
- *E* earlier document but published on or after the international filing date
- *L* document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)
- *O* document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means
- *P* document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

T later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

X document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

Y document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.

A document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

26 June 2000

Date of mailing of the international search report

05/07/2000

Name and mailing address of the ISA

European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2
NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk
Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl,
Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016

Authorized officer

De Herdt, O

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

Intern. Appl. Application No

PCT/GB 00/01070

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
GB 2301048 A	27-11-1996	NONE	
US 4279628 A	21-07-1981	NONE	

**This Page is Inserted by IFW Indexing and Scanning
Operations and is not part of the Official Record**

BEST AVAILABLE IMAGES

Defective images within this document are accurate representations of the original documents submitted by the applicant.

Defects in the images include but are not limited to the items checked:

- ☐ BLACK BORDERS
- ☐ IMAGE CUT OFF AT TOP, BOTTOM OR SIDES
- ☒ FADED TEXT OR DRAWING
- ☒ BLURRED OR ILLEGIBLE TEXT OR DRAWING
- ☐ SKEWED/SLANTED IMAGES
- ☐ COLOR OR BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS
- ☐ GRAY SCALE DOCUMENTS
- ☒ LINES OR MARKS ON ORIGINAL DOCUMENT
- ☒ REFERENCE(S) OR EXHIBIT(S) SUBMITTED ARE POOR QUALITY
- ☐ OTHER: _____

IMAGES ARE BEST AVAILABLE COPY.

As rescanning these documents will not correct the image problems checked, please do not report these problems to the IFW Image Problem Mailbox.

THIS PAGE BLANK (USPTO)